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ABSTRACT

Given the help they want and need, families do spend time with their young children in developmentally appropriate learning activities. Following a successful experience with Family Connections 1, the Rural Excel Program at the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) developed a second volume of 22 colorful, four-page guides to learning, designed for parents to use with their kindergarten and early primary children. AEL pilot tested the guides at 10 predominantly rural schools in Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. Evaluation questionnaires were completed by the 34 cooperating teachers and 439 parents of students in kindergarten, grade 1, or mixed primary classes. Both parents and teachers reacted positively to the publication and reported that children also responded favorably. Teachers found the activities developmentally appropriate for students and agreed they would recommend Family Connections 2 to other teachers. The pilot test revealed that the guides are suitable for use with kindergarten children and with mixed-age classes limited to K-1. Rural Excel staff involved key educational leaders in all stages of product development, thereby increasing the likelihood of product acceptance. Appendices contain parent and teacher questionnaires and parent comments. (TD)

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Development and Pilot Test of *Family Connections 2*

by
Patricia H. Penn
and
Robert D. Childers

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION		Page
I.	ABSTRACT	1
II.	INTRODUCTION	2
	The *Family Connections 1* Experience	2
	Rationale for Continuing Emphasis on Family Involvement	4
	Purpose and Audiences of Evaluation Report	5
III.	DEVELOPING *FAMILY CONNECTIONS 2*	6
	The Advisory Group	6
	Design and Content of Volume II	8
IV.	THE PILOT TEST PROCEDURES	9
	Sample	9
	Pilot-test schools	9
	Pilot-test teachers	10
	Pilot-test students	11
	Data Collection Instruments	12
	Parent reaction form	12
	Teacher questionnaire	13
	Advisory Group reactions	13
	Process	13
	Production of the guides	13
	On-site coordination	13
V.	PILOT-TEST EVALUATION FINDINGS	15
	Parent Reactions to *Family Connections 2*	15
	Teacher Reactions to *Family Connections 2*	22
	Advisory Group Reaction to *Family Connections 2*	29
	Focus group	30
	Videotaped comments	33
VI.	DISCUSSION	35
	Parent Reaction to Guides	36
	Teacher Reaction to Guides	37
	Reactions from Advisory Group	38
VII.	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	40
	Conclusions	40
	Recommendations	41
VIII.	REFERENCES	43

TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

APPENDICES

A: Parent Reaction Form
B: Teacher Questionnaire
C: Parent Responses to Open-Ended Question
D: Completed Evaluation Standards Checklist

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1:	Number of Schools, Teachers, and Students Participating in the Pilot Test by Site	9
2:	Years of Experience of Pilot-Test Teachers	11
3:	Number of Pilot-Test Students by State and Grade Level	12
4:	Parents' Reactions to the Messages to Parents in *Family Connections 2* (N = 439)	16
5:	Parents' Reactions to the Activities in *Family Connections 2* (N = 438)	17
6:	Parents' Reactions to the Verses and Poems in *Family Connections 2* (N = 427)	18
7:	Parents' Responses on the Amount of Time They Spend Per Week With Their Child Using *Family Connections 2* (N = 420)	19
8:	Ways Pilot-Test Teachers Prepared Families for the Use of *Family Connections*	23
9:	Number and Percentage of Teachers Who Sent *Family Connections* Home the Same Day of the Week by Day of the Week	24
10:	Frequency With Which Pilot-Test Teachers Wrote Sunshine Grams	25
11:	Type of *Family Connections* Training Pilot-Test Teachers Received	25
12:	Means and Standard Deviations of Pilot-Test Teachers' Responses to Individual Items on *Family Connections 2* Scale	27

SECTION I: ABSTRACT

Given the help they want and need, families do spend time with their young children in developmentally appropriate learning activities. Following a successful experience with ***Family Connections 1***, the Rural Excel program at the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) developed a second volume of a set of guides to learning. AEL pilot tested the colorful, four-page guides, designed for use with kindergarten and early primary children, at schools in all four states served by AEL. Both parents and teachers reacted positively to the publication and reported that children responded favorably, as well.

Parental enthusiasm for the guides could be measured by the rate at which they responded to reaction forms teachers sent home for them to complete. More than 60 percent returned completed forms. Teachers agreed (virtually unanimously) that they would recommend the use of ***Family Connections 2*** to other teachers; 96 percent also found the activities developmentally appropriate for their students. The project's Advisory Group members encouraged schools to use the guides even after the test was concluded.

The pilot test revealed that the guides are suitable for use with kindergarten children and with mixed-age classes limited to K-1. Whether they are useful for older children is dependent upon the amount of the child's preschool experience and the richness of the home environment.

Rural Excel staff involved key educational leaders in all stages of product development, thereby increasing the likelihood of product acceptance. Within a month of ***Family Connections 2*** availability, more than 100 packages had been shipped. Of an initial printing of more than 800 packages, approximately one-third were sold within four months.

SECTION II: INTRODUCTION

> "Over the course of my lifetime, Americans have come to demand more of our children's teachers, but we have yet to demand more of our children's parents. We do need to be sensitive to all of the burdens on parents today, particularly longer work days, but when it comes to the education of our children, we need to find ways that will help America's parents to do more." (President Clinton, Instructor, September 1993, 103, (2).

The Appalachia Educational Laboratory's Rural Excel program has one primary goal: to provide rural educators with tested materials and practices that show promise of improving student performance in classrooms. Because the program's work is guided by regional educators, their positive reaction to ***Family Connections***, which was first available for 1992-93 school year, led to production of a second volume of the colorful guides to in-home learning for families. ***Family Connections 2***, for use with kindergarten and early primary children, is the response to repeated requests for more of the readable, easy-to-use, low-cost materials.

The *Family Connections 1* Experience

The Rural Excel program's original plan for an early childhood project was designed to meet three objectives:

1. To increase communications between teachers of young children and their families.
2. To increase the amount of time families spend with their young children on developmentally appropriate activities.
3. To increase parental understanding of developmentally appropriate curriculum and activities in programs for young children.

To those ends, staff developed 30 issues of ***Family Connections***, a colorful, four-page publication to be disseminated weekly to the homes of preschool-aged children. Program success as judged by parent and teacher reactions is described in Field-Test Evaluation of ***Family Connections***, Volume I (Childers and Penn, 1992). In brief, parent reaction to the guides was uniformly positive, as was that of teachers. Schools with programs for four-year-old children increased the amount of communication between school and home when they used ***Family Connections***. Field-test teachers in 10 eastern Kentucky programs for four-year-olds reported increased interest and involvement of parents in meetings and other activities as families used the guides.

Following the field test, the Kentucky Department of Education ordered sufficient sets to serve 20,000 at-risk families. ***Family Connections*** (now renamed ***Family Connections 1***) sold out a first printing within seven months of its becoming available. By the end of 1993, the publication had been revised to incorporate subsequent evaluation findings and went into a third printing; it was by then being used in some 30 states. It had also been selected in fall 1992 for the Regional Educational Laboratories Proven Practices Program. Research for Better Schools and Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory adopted it for implementation in their regions. Three other Laboratories--North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, The Regional Laboratory for Education Improvement of the Northeast and Islands/The Network, Inc., and SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education--elected to promote ***Family Connections*** as an effective family involvement practice through their regional transitions conferences.

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The number of requests for a second volume continued to increase as the use of ***Family Connections*** expanded. Both school personnel and families repeatedly expressed a need for issues suitable for use with kindergarten and early primary children. Rural Excel staff therefore decided to explore options for further development.

Rationale for Continuing Emphasis on Family Involvement

Throughout the ***Family Connections 1*** development and dissemination process, staff continued to collect evidence that validates the importance of family involvement in young children's learning. Much of the research supports one of the major features of ***Family Connections***: its stress on the importance of family members reading aloud to their children. Adams (1990) described the importance of parents reading aloud to children regularly and interactively--that is, posing questions and eliciting comments from children during the reading. ***Family Connections*** included at least one read-aloud selection in every issue, and frequently added activities to encourage parents to read interactively. It therefore made sense to continue on that path for a second volume. (In 1993, an Office of Educational Research and Improvement [OERI] working paper reviewing the learning readiness goal research validated AEL's decision when it indicated that "the most important parental teaching strategy is to read aloud to children regularly and interactively.")

Powell (1991) found that parental attitudes, behaviors, and teaching strategies are woven into "routine, daily exchanges between parent and child, and it is impossible to identify one parent factor as the most significant influence on children." Every issue of ***Family Connections*** includes a variety of activities and information to account for widely varying interests, preferences, and skills of family members. The guides are also responsive to

research-stimulated concerns about television's role in the family (Signorielli, 1991); more than one message to parents addresses the subject. Finally, preventive intervention can help strengthen families, and such strengthening has major benefits for children (Morisset, 1993). ***Family Connections*** is designed to reach parents and children at the earliest possible intervention point for schools.

Anecdotal evidence was at least as persuasive as literature review in Rural Excel's decision to produce a second volume. Parents told Rural Excel staff, who met with them during visits to ***Family Connections 1*** field-test schools, that they would like to have ***Family Connections*** to use for another year. Teachers said that one year of use was not enough, especially for families whose children had not had learning enrichment experiences in early childhood. Staff decided to develop a second volume and revised the project plan accordingly.

Purpose and Audiences of Evaluation Report

The purpose of this evaluation is to document reactions of parents and teachers, as well as other early childhood specialists, to a volume of ***Family Connections*** guides for families of kindergarten and early primary children.

This evaluation report has two primary audiences: (1) project staff, AEL administration, and the program monitor from OERI; and (2) state departments of education personnel, local education leaders, Chapter 1 directors, child care providers, and others responsible for providing educational services to young children and for administering parent involvement programs. Early childhood specialists in higher education, parents and parent groups, and researchers in preschool education and parent involvement make up a secondary audience.

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SECTION III: DEVELOPING *FAMILY CONNECTIONS 2*

Rural Excel had involved key educational leaders in all stages of ***Family Connections 1*** development, which staff believed increased product use. Staff therefore elected to follow the same approach to the work in developing a second volume.

The Advisory Group

In mid-October 1992, a group of state department of education early childhood specialists and a number of experienced practitioners joined the Family Connections project coordinator at a retreat to begin planning for ***Family Connections 2***. Those present (excepting a preschool consultant from the Kentucky education department who was there to provide an historical perspective) became the Advisory Group to the proposed second volume. Consultation with state early childhood experts enabled Rural Excel to invite outstanding practitioners. State department representatives from Virginia and West Virginia were unable to be present because of schedule conflicts, but both states were ably represented by kindergarten and early primary teachers and an elementary principal.

Prior to the meeting, participants were sent a notebook containing the 30 issues of Volume I with a handbook; a copy of the brochure "Families Count"; and a copy of the Burns (1992) paper, "Parent Reactions to ***Family Connections***, Volume I: A Follow-Up Study." Some issues the group examined were:

- How might Volume II be different from Volume I? What would be the mission and philosophy? Who were possible audiences? What would be the nature of the content? Format?

- What kinds of activities might be included in Volume II issues to help parents work with their children to develop skills in math, science, language, music, movement, and health and nutrition?
- What were the major questions to be answered on the general subject of developmental appropriateness?

The group also dealt with another question: If you could deliver only one message to parents of young children, what would it be? Generating a great many possible messages provided the framework for sharing activities and other content for ***Family Connections*** as the workshop progressed.

A group consensus emerged that informed subsequent work: the single most important thing parents can give their children is time. The group concluded that time is the one commodity every parent can give, and that parents should also give their children, along with time, the opportunity to be children--to enjoy, discover, explore, and interact with the environment.

Awareness of the child's individuality was also accorded a place of great importance as a message. Developmental appropriateness is key, participants said; age appropriateness is less an issue because developmental stages occur at such varying chronological ages. The group agreed that the first volume of ***Family Connections*** would be useful with several age or grade levels, depending on the nature of programs and the individual children and families, and that Volume II could also be broadly useful.

The group concluded that developing self-esteem in children and their parents might be the defining mission for the guides. Helping parents understand the importance of play in learning, along with the necessity to see their own child as an individual, and giving them activities that are easy to do and fun, could all help give children a positive self-concept.

The planning retreat went well beyond expectations in achieving its purpose. The group responded to the questions posed and generated an abundance of resources. Their responses to concerns about how to deal effectively with equity issues in ***Family Connections*** became part of the final product, as did much of their work at the planning retreat.

Design and Content of Volume II

The Advisory Group strongly recommended that the same design used for the first volume continue with ***Family Connections 2***: a four-page format, printed on brightly colored paper, and including a place for the name of the child. This recommendation reinforced staff opinion that the original design was sound. The group also advised that content follow the pattern of the first volume, with each issue including a front-page message to parents, at least one read-aloud selection, and a variety of experiential learning activities. This, too, reinforced project staff's wish to have research findings inform content decisions. The group unanimously supported continuing the use of Sunshine Grams in every fourth issue.

The group agreed to serve as reviewers throughout the development of ***Family Connections 2*** to completion of the pilot test. Practitioners in the group also agreed to participate in pilot testing, subject to agreement from their principals. During the production phase of the guides, group members critiqued a total of 22 issues in various stages of development at meetings held in Charleston, West Virginia, in February and May. A number of their suggestions were incorporated into the published guides. In one instance, an activity was replaced as a result of their input.

SECTION IV: THE PILOT TEST PROCEDURES

The pilot test of ***Family Connections 2*** took place during the second semester of the 1992-93 school year. A principal, a regional early childhood consultant, and four teachers from the Advisory Group served as test-site coordinators, working with a total of 34 teachers in 10 schools in four states: Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Sample

The number of schools, teachers, and students participating in the pilot test, by site, is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Number of Schools, Teachers, and Students Participating in the Pilot Test by Site

Test Site	Number of Schools	Number of Teachers	Number of Students
Site A	1	5	175
Site B	1	5	103
Site C	1	8	112
Site D	5	6	109
Site E	1	5	101
Site F	1	5	114
TOTAL	10	34	714

Pilot-test schools. Data were collected from 10 schools; the National Center for Statistics' Common Core of Data descriptors by locale characterized them as four rural, four small town, one urban fringe mid-size city, and one

mid-size central city. The schools varied in composition as well, the smallest having 95 students in K-5, the largest, 722 students in K-5. Two of the schools had prekindergarten populations: one had 375 students in preK-2, the other, 297 in preK-5. Only one school served K-6 children, and the remainder were K-5 schools.

The percentage of student body at the pilot schools who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch ranged from 20 percent to more than 50 percent. ***Family Connections 2*** project staff asked teachers to describe the socioeconomic status of their student population and how their school system qualified children as "at risk." With two exceptions, schools made the at-risk determination by eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch. One school included economic deprivation, home problems, developmental delay, and academic difficulties in making the at-risk determination. Another used teacher observation and lower quartile scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills in addition to free-lunch eligibility to designate students as at risk. The Common Core of Data indicated that two communities had minority populations of about 20 percent each, largely African-American. The other eight communities had very small minority populations; two reported 100 percent white populations.

Pilot-test teachers. All 34 teachers who participated had at least a baccalaureate and all were certified for the level at which they taught: 18 had bachelor's degrees, 10 had master's, and six had 15 to 30 hours beyond the MA degree. Their years of teaching experience ranged from one year to 29 years, with a mean of 13.13. Five had fewer than five years' experience; six had taught for 20 or more years. All were women. Table 2 summarizes the years of experience of participating teachers.

Table 2

Years of Classroom Experience of Pilot-Test Teachers

Experience	Number	Valid Percent
Less than 5 years	5	16.7
5 to 9 years	3	10.0
10 to 14 years	10	33.3
15 to 19 years	6	20.0
20 plus	6	20.0
VALID CASES	30	100.0
Missing Cases	4	
Median = 12.0		
Mean = 13.13		
Standard Deviation = 6.98		
Range 1-29		

Pilot-test students. The 714 students who received *Family Connections 2* during the pilot test consisted of kindergarten, first grade, and mixed-age groupings including one of third and fourth graders. Project staff were interested in exploring upper limits for age appropriateness; theoretically, families might use the guides with children aged five through eight. Of the 34 teachers, 21 taught kindergarten; six taught K-1; four taught first grade; and three taught mixed-grade primary. Table 3 displays the student population by state and grade level.

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Table 3

Number of Pilot-Test Students by State and Grade Level

State	Number of Students	Grade Level			
		Kindergarten	K-1	First	Primary
KY	276	92	121	-	63
TN	112	112	-	-	-
VA	103	103	-	-	-
WV	223	148	-	75	-
TOTAL	714	455	121	75	63

Data Collection Instruments

Two instruments were used in evaluating ***Family Connections 2***: a parent reaction form and a teacher questionnaire. Project staff also collected data from the Advisory Group in two other ways--through five questions posed in a focus group, and through videotaped responses to off-camera questions.

Parent reaction form. This instrument is a revision of the form used in field testing ***Family Connections 1***. The nameplate from the guides headed the form, which included a printed note to parents asking them for their opinions and use patterns of ***Family Connections 2***. The child's teacher signed the note. Questions dealt with such topics as the messages to parents, read-aloud selections, activities, and amount of time spent with children on the guides. The forms sought overall reactions and comments, asked whether respondents wished to continue receiving the guides, and asked whether they would be willing to speak with someone from AEL by telephone. A copy of the form is included as Appendix A.

Teacher questionnaire. The teacher questionnaire contains questions about how they used the guides, 10 items on a Likert-type "agree-disagree" measure, and open-ended questions about their personal likes and dislikes of ***Family Connections 2***. The Cronbach-Alpha reliability coefficient for the scale was .90 based on 26 questionnaires with all items answered. A copy of the questionnaire is included as Appendix B. Data are described under Teacher Responses in the following section.

Advisory Group reactions. The evaluation data were gathered from transcriptions of two structured experiences with the Advisory Group: a focus group conducted by non-project staff at the conclusion of the pilot test, and videotaped responses by individual group members to off-camera questions. Those data are described in Advisory Group Responses in the following section.

Process

Production of the guides. Project staff began producing the guides immediately following the Advisory Group retreat. By February, the first six issues were available for critique by the group, and two issues were given to coordinators to be distributed to participating teachers. Production continued throughout the test, with suggested revisions incorporated for final printing. Although only 15 issues were distributed to test sites, the Advisory Group provided critiques on an additional seven. By the time of the final meeting of the Advisory Group in May, the writer-editor was comfortable that she was able to be responsive to the group's concerns. Staff were able to meet a print deadline that would make ***Family Connections 2*** available for use in the 1993-94 school year.

On-site coordination. Members of the Advisory Group who agreed to serve as site coordinators began teacher recruitment shortly after the mid-October

retreat. AEL's Family Connections project director then executed agreements with teachers and principals at the test sites. Project staff agreed to provide free weekly copies of the guides, data collection forms, and ***Family Connections*** Handbooks to the teachers. Test-site coordinators agreed to familiarize teachers with the guides, using materials provided by AEL, to facilitate implementation and to collect data for transmission to the Laboratory. Teachers agreed to distribute the guides weekly and to assist AEL in evaluating Family Connections products and procedures.

Project staff provided transmittal sheets for the coordinators to use when sending completed forms to AEL. Throughout the course of the pilot test, project staff sent packets of ***Family Connections 2*** to site coordinators for distribution to participating teachers. Each school chose a day on which to send the guides home with students, and individual teachers invented various carriers, ranging from zip-top baggies that displayed the colorful guides to decorated folders that traveled with the child between home and school.

To obtain information from families about use patterns and reactions, teachers inserted parent reaction forms in certain issues. They signed the forms, and encouraged children to ask parents to complete them.

SECTION V: PILOT-TEST EVALUATION FINDINGS

Parent Reactions to *Family Connections 2*

Teachers distributed parent reaction forms to families of 714 students enrolled in the test-site classes; 439 respondents returned the forms, for a response rate of 61.4 percent. Not every respondent answered every question, as becomes apparent in the following section. In responding to open-ended items, many respondents mentioned a number of aspects of the guides. Evaluators considered recording only the first response to each item when analyzing the data, but to take advantage of the quantity, they decided to keep all responses, which resulted in more responses than respondents.

The first question sought information for teachers about the number of issues the family had received. At the time the forms were completed, approximately 80 percent of the respondents had received four or more issues; 25 percent had received seven to nine issues; and 12 percent reported receiving 10-12 issues. Question 2 called on respondents to "check all that apply" in a list of descriptors of the front-page message to parents. Table 4 displays the number and valid percentages* by response option. "Interesting" received almost 78 percent, followed by "helpful" at 72 percent, "easy to read" at 67.8 percent, and "practical" at 52.5 percent. Only 4.6 percent found the messages "too simple." The options "hard to read," "not practical," and "boring" were checked one time each.

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*Valid percentages exclude questionnaires with no response to a particular item.

Table 4

Parents' Reactions to the Messages to Parents in *Family Connections 2** (N = 439)

Response Options	Number	Valid Percent
Interesting	341	77.9
Too Simple	20	4.6
Easy to Read	297	67.8
Hard to Read	1	.2
Not Practical	1	.2
Helpful	316	72.1
Not Helpful	0	.0
Boring	1	.2
Practical	230	52.5

*Survey Question: A message to you as parents is on the front page of each issue. Would you say the messages are (check {√} all that apply).

Table 5 shows responses to Question 3, which again asked respondents to check "all that apply" to describe how they felt about activities in the guides. "Easy to do," "fun for my child," and "interesting," received percentages of 73.1, 71.0, and 70.8, respectively. Almost 47 percent checked "useful"; 34.5 percent indicated they "would like more activities." Fewer than one percent checked "too hard to do" or "boring," and only 2.7 percent checked "don't have supplies."

Table 5

Parents' Reactions to the Activities in *Family Connections 2** (N = 438)

Response Options	Number	Valid Percent
Interesting	310	70.8
Easy To Do	320	73.1
Don't Have Supplies	12	2.7
Too Hard To Do	1	.2
Fun For My Child	311	71.0
Boring	4	.9
Useful	205	46.8
Would Like More Activities	151	34.5

*Survey Question: *Family Connections 2* also has directions for activities you can do with your child. Please check (√) all of the following that describe how you feel about the activities.

The fourth question asked whether parents read aloud to their children the verses and poems in *Family Connections 2*. "Yes" responses made up 83.8 percent of the total. Those respondents were asked further to indicate whether their own experience was "enjoyable," "boring," or "interesting"; 83.2 percent checked "enjoyable," 50.8 percent checked "interesting," and 0.8 percent checked "boring." Percentages were similar for the child's experience (as judged by the parent): 82.7, "enjoyable"; 54.3 percent, "interesting"; and 2.3 percent, "boring." Table 6 displays these data.

Table 6

Parents' Reactions to the Verses and Poems in *Family Connections 2** (N = 427)

Response Options	Number	Valid Percent
YES (read aloud the verses and poems to my child)	358	83.8
NO (did not read aloud the verses and poems to my child)	69	16.2
My Experience (N = 358)		
Enjoyable	298	83.2
Boring	3	.8
Interesting	182	50.8
Child's Experience (N = 346)		
Enjoyable	286	82.7
Boring	8	2.3
Interesting	188	54.3

*Survey Question: Did you read aloud to your child the verses and poems in *Family Connections 2*? If yes, what kind of experience did you and your child have? Check (√) all that apply.

Question 5 asked respondents to estimate the amount of time spent in an average week using *Family Connections 2* with their children. Table 7 shows the results: 36.9 percent spent 5 to 14 minutes, followed closely by 31.9 percent who spent 15 to 29 minutes; 12.4 percent, less than 5 minutes; 11.9 percent who spent 30 to 59 minutes; 6.4 percent, 1 to 2 hours; and 0.5 percent, more than 2 hours.

Table 7

Parents' Responses on the Amount of Time They Spend Per Week With Their Child Using *Family Connections 2** (N = 420)

Response Options	Number	Valid Percent
Less Than 5 Minutes	52	12.4
5 to 14 Minutes	155	36.9
15 to 29 Minutes	134	31.9
30 to 59 Minutes	50	11.9
1 to 2 Hours	27	6.4
More Than 2 Hours	2	.5

*Survey Question: How much time would you estimate you spend in an average week with your child using *Family Connections 2*?

The parent reaction form contained three open-ended questions: (1) What do you like best about *Family Connections 2*? (2) What do you like least about *Family Connections 2*? (3) Is there anything else you would like to say about *Family Connections 2*? Parents responded to the open-ended questions in sometimes remarkable detail and with evident thought.

Responses to "best-liked" (Question 1) sorted easily into three major content categories: activities, message to parents, and verses/poems. Other responses fell into three less specific groups that could be described as (1) family fun/interaction/involvement; (2) format/ease of reading/utility; and (3) recipes/nutrition.

Of the 350 respondents who answered the first question, 170 named "activities" as best-liked, either exclusively or, more often, with other things. (A number of responses were multiple, so total counts vary from group to group.) About 100 named "messages" or "the front page" as best-liked.

"Verses/poems" were named either best-liked or among favorite features by 77 respondents. Twenty-three mentioned format and/or how easy the guides are to read and to use; 17 mentioned recipes or nutrition activities. Five cited personalization (space for child's name on the back page), and three included "Sunshine Grams" among best-liked features.

Several respondents included two or more best-liked responses: "The format, simple parent/child activities, nice poems and stories and the personal touch of my child's name on the 'mail box'" was one such multiple response. Another respondent wrote in: "Poems, riddles, personal note from teacher, [Sunshine Gram], child's name on mailbox." "The poems and the different ways you can fix healthy snacks," and "The format, the info on parenting skills, easy readability," were two other multiple responses.

One respondent's comment was detailed: "Poems on the back; fact that activities are designed to be done 'at the kitchen table' without a lot of setup and cleanup; activities ingeniously show how to work developmental skills into routine of daily life; messages are good reminders of things we tend to forget in the hustle of busy schedules."

Some responses to the first question were not specific to features, but rather spoke of perceptions or effects: "Watching my children's faces light up and the questions they ask." "It makes me more aware about what I need to do to help my child learn and grow." "Gets children and parents in touch with each other again." Other responses included: "The interesting ways to communicate with children and helps to open my eyes to their needs. I can include all of my children in most of them." "Reminding us parents that simplicity is the key to learning and more enjoyable, too. Also that we as

parents must demonstrate what we want our child to become through our day-to-day lives."

Responses to the "least-liked" question, which 191 respondents answered, were less numerous and, notably, not always negative. The most frequent response, 92, was "nothing" or "I liked everything." Another 16 responded that the guides were "not long enough" or "don't come often enough." One respondent wrote, "We will sure miss it during the summer." Another commented, "It should be adapted to every grade level." Other comments included "We liked everything." "I haven't found anything yet [that I liked least]. I just haven't much free time for it."

The most frequent criticisms were "too simple/too general/not enough to read to child" (25); "too busy/don't have time/get too much from school" (12); "needs more activities for older children/more parenting advice" (nine). Six respondents said they didn't like poems; one didn't like the message. Four criticized the format: "not colorful," "not enough pictures," and "not punched [for a notebook]." One respondent wanted "more about boys." One characterized it as "boring." Another said "It assumes modern moms spend a lot of time in the kitchen processing." (The latter comment was interesting in light of the fact that the guides deliberately do not use the words "mother" or "father," so as to encourage either or both parents to work with the child on ***Family Connections.***) One respondent wrote: "I feel as though it's very simplistic and not appropriate for my six-year-old. You're talking down to the reader somewhat. I think I understand why you must do that. . ."

The third open-ended question was, "Is there anything else you would like to say about ***Family Connections 2***?" Staff coded the 158 responses as "positive," "negative," or "neutral." Neutral responses were neither positive

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nor negative, or included elements of both, so were judged to be neutral. Almost 80 percent (126) comments were judged to be positive. "Negative" and "neutral" each had 16 comments assigned, or 10.1 percent each. Representative of positive comments are these four: "I applaud this series; great parental involvement activities; helps children realize that school is not the only place they learn something new--even mom and dad can teach science, social studies, math." "I think it's a great idea." "Good idea to help families do things together." "I feel this is a quality publication."

Two comments judged to be negative are these: "I would like more challenging activities." "I think these activities are geared toward 2-3-4 year olds." Two neutral comments were "I would like to have more activities in ***Family Connections.***" "I think parents need more information on parenting skills specifically." (Three respondents answered the question "no" and one said "none." These were coded neutral.) A compilation of all responses to the third open-ended question is included as Appendix C.

In response to the question, "Would you like to keep getting ***Family Connections 2***?" 81.3 percent checked "yes"; 5.3 percent checked "no"; and 13.4 percent checked "don't care."

Teacher Reactions to ***Family Connections 2***

Site coordinators distributed and collected the Teacher Questionnaire at the conclusion of the pilot test. Of 34 teachers who received the questionnaire, 32 completed and returned it. (Parent reactions that were collected in classes of the two teachers who did not return the Teacher Questionnaire are included in data analysis in the previous section.) The first four items in the questionnaire provided demographic data. The next

five items collected information about how teachers distributed and used the guides during the pilot test.

Table 8 displays responses to the question, "In what ways did you prepare families for the use of ***Family Connections***? Check all that apply." "Written announcements" was checked by 30 of the 32 respondents (93.8 percent). "News release" was checked by 28.1 percent; 12.5 percent checked "Presentation at parent meetings," and 18.8 percent checked "other." (Project staff provided both a written announcement and a news release for teachers who chose to use them.)

Table 8

Ways Pilot-Test Teachers Prepared Families
For The Use of ***Family Connections***

Valid Response Options	Number	Percent
Written Announcements	30	93.8
Presentations at Parent Meetings	4	12.5
News Release	9	28.1
Other	6	18.8

*Survey Question: In what ways did you prepare families for the use of ***Family Connections***? Check (✓) all that apply.

Table 9 displays data on numbers and percentages of teachers who sent the guides home on the same day each week, by day of week. Of the 32 teachers who completed the questionnaire, 29 said they sent ***Family Connections 2*** home on the same day each week. None distributed them on Monday or Tuesday.

Thursday was the choice of slightly more than half the teachers, 51.7 percent. Friday was the distribution day for 31 percent of teachers; Wednesday of 17.2 percent.

Table 9

Number and Percentage of Teachers Who Sent *Family Connections* Home the Same Day of the Week by the Day of the Week

Day	Number	Valid Percent
Monday	0	0.0
Tuesday	0	0.0
Wednesday	5	17.2
Thursday	15	51.7
Friday	9	31.0
TOTAL	29	99.9*

Note: Twenty-nine of the 32 teachers (90.6%) said they sent the guides home on the same day of each week.

*Total does not equal 100 due to rounding.

Table 10 shows responses to a question about frequency of Sunshine Grams. Half of the teachers wrote them every time they appeared in an issue--i.e., every fourth issue. Another 40.6 percent wrote them occasionally, and 9.4 percent did not write the Sunshine Grams.

Table 10

Frequency With Which Pilot-Test Teachers Wrote Sunshine Grams*

Response Options	Number	Valid Percent
Never	3	9.4
Occasionally	13	40.6
Every time they appeared	16	50.0
TOTAL	32	100.0

*Survey Question: How often did you write Sunshine Grams?

The type of training pilot teachers reported receiving is shown in Table 11. The clear majority, 59.4 percent, were trained by "local personnel," the site coordinators. AEL staff trained five teachers, or 15.6 percent. "Other" was the response from 15.6 percent, and 9.4 percent reported that they received no training.

Table 11

Type of *Family Connections* Training Pilot-Test Teachers Received*

Response Options	Number	Valid Percent
From AEL Staff	5	15.6
From Local Personnel	19	59.4
Other	5	15.6
None	3	9.4
VALID CASES	32	100.0

*Survey Question: What type of training, if any, did you receive in using *Family Connections*?

A 10-item scale was included in the teacher questionnaire, with response 1 being "strongly disagree" to 4 being "strongly agree." Mean responses ranged from a high of 3.71 to a low of 2.97 across the 10 items. The means and standard deviations for each item appear in Table 12. The highest mean (3.71) was in response to the item, "As a teacher who has used ***Family Connections***, I would recommend their use to other teachers." The next highest mean (3.59) was for "I believe that Sunshine Grams are a valuable tool for developing self-esteem in children." Items that used the word "evidence" generally had lower means, but still more than 3.1 on a four-point scale. "I believe that parents' use of ***Family Connections*** made a difference in their children's learning" was the only item with a mean under 3.0, at 2.97. More about the responses appears in the Discussion section later in this report.

The teacher questionnaire included three open-ended questions: (1) What do you like best about ***Family Connections***? (2) What do you like least about ***Family Connections***? (3) Please write here anything else you would like to say about ***Family Connections***. Almost 94 percent of respondents commented to the first question; 56.3 percent commented to the second; 65.6 percent wrote comments on the third.

Responses about what teachers liked best (Question 1) covered every aspect of the guides. Many mentioned specific features: activities, Sunshine Grams, messages to parents, read-aloud selections. Comments included these: "I love the Sunshine Grams. Even though it was time-consuming to write them, I think it was well worth it. Many parents and children came back with positive comments about them." "The articles are short. They don't intimidate

Table 12

Means and Standard Deviations of Pilot-Test Teachers' Responses to Individual Items on *Family Connections 2* Scale*

Item	Number	Mean	SD
The activities in ***Family Connections*** are developmentally appropriate for my students.	31	3.52	.68
There is evidence that parents used ***Family Connections*** with their children.	31	3.19	.54
There is evidence that parents like receiving ***Family Connections.***	31	3.16	.64
I believe that parents' use of ***Family Connections*** made a difference in their children's learning.	29	2.97	.57
At times I used activities from ***Family Connections*** with students in the classroom.	32	3.22	.66
There is evidence that parents found ***Family Connections*** easy to use.	30	3.23	.57
There is evidence that when our program provided ***Family Connections*** to parents, they became more involved in their children's learning.	31	3.00	.68
I believe that parents who read the messages on the first page of ***Family Connections*** have a better understanding of how children learn and develop.	31	3.45	.51
I believe that Sunshine Grams are a valuable tool for developing self-esteem in children.	32	3.59	.50
As a teacher who has used ***Family Connections,*** I would recommend their use to other teachers.	31	3.71	.53

*The response scale was from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree).

the parents who can't read or have low literacy levels." "I liked the hands-on math/science activities and the oral language-development activities. Overall, I like the whole package."

Others commented conceptually or philosophically: "***Family Connections*** is a good professional tool for communication to parents. It is an effective model for parents to use with their children. It gives them ideas of the kinds of things which are appropriate for their children." "It encouraged parents to spend quality time with their children." "The messages to parents provide positive reinforcement for good parenting skills and the important role parents and home play in educating children." "***Family Connections*** reminded me a little of a *Reader's Digest*--full of good stories (advice)--recipes, activities, poems--just practical, useful ideas from everyday living." One insightful comment was, "Lots of times we remark that parents are important to the school and to their child's education, but we do not give them ideas to use. ***Family Connections*** does this and makes it fun besides."

Some teachers, like many parent respondents, made positive comments in response to the second question, "What do you like least about ***Family Connections***?" Examples are "That I did not have them sooner." "Everything was great!" "Sorry, I liked all aspects of [the guides]." A few responses spoke to logistics of the pilot test: "Extra paperwork." "The extra paperwork and shuffle." "Sending out parent surveys." Comments directed to content were rare, but specific: "Need to widen range of activities for more advanced children." "A couple of the issues were 'too young' for students of [school]--most of these students have a good preschool background." "Many of the activities were not challenging enough." "I'd like to see something added for first graders to enhance reading. Simple poem or idea--1st grade corner?"

Comments in response to Question 3, "Please write here anything else you like to say about ***Family Connections***" ranged widely. Among them: "Activities started out a little too simple, but improved. Excellent ideas!" "If parents took the time to read the literature, it did provide activities and information." "I appreciate the opportunity to provide ***Family Connections*** for the [name of school] students and parents. We have enjoyed the poems and activities that we did in the classroom. The children seemed very proud to have received ***Family Connections*** to take home." "The ***Family Connections*** has been a great idea this year. We do need a formal means of communicating with parents. I would like the activities to be more challenging."

Overall, teachers' responses to the guides were favorable: "I have enjoyed using ***Family Connections 2***. I think it is great! I wish every parent would take the time to do some of the activities with their child. I would hear, 'My mommy wouldn't do them.' The child was interested, but mommy wasn't. The activities are developmentally appropriate for the children." "I hope we can continue using these again." "Wish I could have had all issues." "The children really look forward to getting another copy to take home." "I plan to use it with my kindergarten students next year." "Thanks!!! I hope my school will buy the complete set next year and that I'll be able to use them all year. I'd like to have them when I make a home visit or have parent orientation in the fall. Over the summer I hope to make audio tapes." "There is a definite need for more tools, such as this, for helping parents work with their children."

Advisory Group Reaction to ***Family Connections 2***

In addition to their critique of the individual issues, the Advisory Group provided reactions in two forms. As part of the final meeting in May, they

participated in a focus group and in a videotape session where they responded to off-camera questions. Transcripts of both activities were prepared.

Focus Group. Participants responded to five discussion-producing questions during the focus group:

1. What kinds of evidence do you have that families use ***Family Connections 2***?
2. Do you have evidence that families like getting the guides? If so, what kinds?
3. If you agree that parent use of ***Family Connections 2*** made a difference in children's learning, what makes you think so?
4. To what extent do you think the front-page messages add to parents' understanding of how their children learn and develop?
5. Are the Sunshine Grams and the place for the child's name a valuable use of the space in ***Family Connections 2***? If so, what purpose do you think personalizing the guides serves?

In response to the first question, one group member related that one of her sites used a wall in the main hall of the school as a display space for products of ***Family Connections*** activities. It was labeled WHAT WE DID AT HOME WITH ***Family Connections 2***. "Any child who had done something at home on paper--a drawing or something of that sort--could bring it to be displayed on the wall. There were several very proud pieces on display there."

Another site coordinator reported with regard to the second question, "I have parents who come to school to pick their children up and they were always excited when it was the day--'Oh, good, I see we have a ***Family Connections.***' They really look forward to it." And another said, "My parents were really enthusiastic because it gave them something planned for them to do. It helped

guarantee that they spent time with their child. They didn't have to think of something to do. They could rely on ***Family Connections*** and they said it was more of a family time--something that the family did together. Younger brothers and sisters or older ones could join in, too. I think that was an advantage that we didn't anticipate. We found that preschoolers were having the advantage of the kindergarten child bringing it home. I didn't even think about that."

As to whether using the guides made a difference in children's learning, one respondent reported an unanticipated use of the guides by a teacher. "We have one teacher who was using [the guides] as a basis for a regular meeting with six or seven parents. Each time they came in the newsletter was the focus of that meeting and they would branch out into different things. The teacher said that she believed that parent involvement had made a significant difference in [the attitude of a child the coordinator had taught earlier] how this one child felt about school and what was happening." Later in the discussion the same coordinator added:

> I can't back this up with anything except my own intuitive belief, but I think in some cases we have had a rather limited perspective on what we believe that parents can do in terms of extending the learning of the school. Parent involvement has been limited to a parent coming in and cutting letters for bulletin boards or assisting in that way, and we never quite thought about trying to extend the child's learning and connect what is happening at home.... But I believe this will help the school and the home understand the way learning can be extended. And so I think these [***Family Connections***] are really good for both.

A principal in the group said that one of the most positive points about using the guides is in answering parents' questions about what they can do to help their children learn. "I know in our school parents always have that question. Teachers would be frustrated; they would maybe give them a list of things. This is a friendly way of giving [parents] advice, a tool we can use. We have given them an avenue--ideas to use together and that we place value on

the time that they spend with their child. We are teachers, but they are the first teacher. That makes them feel important."

The group consensus on messages to parents was that they gave parents a better sense of how children learn and what is important in their growth and development. One member commented, "This is particularly important right now because of the restructuring that is taking place in schools. Parents are really feeling uncertain because they keep thinking, 'What is it I am supposed to be doing?' There are lots of vehicles out there and different ways of getting activities to parents but I'm not sure there is [another] way of getting this information. I don't have access to any other way [than these guides]."

One teacher said that the disadvantage of teaching is "we never see the child when they come home. I was in a situation where I had a student in my room whose mother was a teacher. So I got to see immediately after school him taking her his ***Family Connection*** and the Sunshine Gram and you could see the excitement and the enthusiasm. We miss all the neat things that happen when that child goes home."

The group agreed that Sunshine Grams were popular with both parents and children. Some teachers had the child participate in deciding what to put in the Grams. One had her pupils write them (using invented spelling) to someone in their family. She translated for the parents in writing, but the children also "read" the message to its recipient. "It was neat for them to experience writing one for someone else. They could see how it made someone else feel just as good as they felt."

When the focus group facilitator probed for changes the group might want to see in ***Family Connections***, these were some of the responses. "I like the length of it. I would not want it to be expanded. It's just the right [size]. The

illustrations are very appropriate for children and adults; they are both drawn toward it." "It's print rich but not so much they would grow tired of reading." "One parent who did not use them during the school year said she was saving them to do during the weeks that her child was going to be home during the summer. And she said so we will have a whole book of things to do so that he won't lose what he has learned in school this year--so he won't turn off in the summer." "I think it's fine the way it is. Just right. Don't bother it--it is just right."

The closing comment was, "We have two schools and each of them went to their school decisionmaking councils and each of the two councils decided that they would purchase them for the next year as soon as they are available. They have already appropriated the money."

Videotaped comments. Five of the seven Advisory Group members responded to off-camera questions about what they as teachers liked best about ***Family Connections***, whether they would recommend it to other teachers, and what their experience had been with parents who used the guides. All said they would recommend their use to other teachers, primarily because of what parents said about them. One site coordinator spoke eloquently:

> I think parents like ***Family Connections*** because it brings them closer to what is happening in the classroom with their children. As we are moving toward restructuring schools, parents are feeling very insecure about what's happening. School is not always the way that they knew it. ***Family Connections*** helps our parents understand and allows them to take part in the learning of their children in ways that they are really liking to do.
>
> ***Family Connections*** brings to home the best of teaching and learning and allows the parent to really function as an effective teacher with the child. Parents do that naturally. But what [the guides] will do for parents is to bring the learning of the school and the learning of the home closer together in ways that we can really focus upon progress for the child. [It] is an absolutely wonderful reflection of

what is happening in developmentally appropriate classrooms and it gives parents the security of knowing that many of the things they are doing at home are the right kinds of things to be doing, and that there are other things that they can add.

SECTION VI: DISCUSSION

Rural Excel program staff attempted to achieve as much diversity as possible in the pilot-test population so as to determine the utility of ***Family Connections*** with other than so-called at-risk families. Two examples illustrate the diversity achieved.

One coordinator taught kindergarten in an affluent suburban community. She found many of the children in her class to be overscheduled and "hurried through childhood." They had after-school lessons in dance and gymnastics, and participated in T-ball and other sports activities. "How much time will a child who has 45 Barbi dolls spend with ***Family Connections***? These parents give their kids a lot of things, but not much time," she commented.

At the other extreme were kindergarten children in a large consolidated school that served a poor, very rural community. Teachers described the area as isolated, low-income, high unemployment, all-white, with low education levels. The coordinator there said she found the parents with whom she worked to be sometimes distant emotionally as well as geographically. She was concerned that they would find ***Family Connections*** too "print rich." She later reported that parents found the guides easy to use and inexpensive, requiring only materials they had on hand. "We have a very spread-out parent community. ***Family Connections*** helped me feel closer to parents that I couldn't see every day or even weekly. This was a bridge between school and home."

Having site coordinators enabled the project to include this more diverse population. The schools comprised a broad geographic spectrum from remotely rural to suburban, encompassing an equally broad socioeconomic range, which provided a richer test for the materials. On the other hand, project staff missed the opportunity to work personally with all the participating teachers to

ensure their familiarity with ***Family Connections*** and its use. To gain diversity in respondents, the project probably lost some quantity and quality of responses, especially from parents.

Parent Reaction to Guides

Reaction from parents of children in kindergarten was uniformly positive. Their comments echoed those of parents who were involved in the field test of ***Family Connections 1***, whose children were in programs for four-year-olds. The majority of respondents indicated a strong interest in helping their young children be successful in school and a desire for suitable ideas and materials. As teachers have said since the inception of the Family Connections project, the majority of parents want to help but are uncertain about what to do. Parents said over and over on parent reaction forms that they found the weekly guides easy to read and use, inexpensive of both materials and time, and fun.

The same was largely true of parents of very early primary children, with a few exceptions among parents who indicated that their children had extensive preschool experience. Project staff were particularly interested in whether the guides would be useful to families of children beyond kindergarten. Advisory Group members had speculated that children in grade two and perhaps three would find them helpful. As might seem intuitively obvious, the degree of interest appeared to relate to whether a child had been in preschool and to the richness of the home environment. Comments from both parents and teachers suggesting that materials were too simple or too young for children came from the second and third grade population, or from families who provided cultural and educational advantages to their children.

The timing of the pilot test could also have negatively influenced reaction. ***Family Connections 2***, unlike the first volume, does progress in degree of complexity, so that families have materials they consider suitable for their rapidly developing children. Because the pilot test began in February, families were using beginning issues of the guides well into the school year. Theoretically, in developmentally appropriate classrooms, the individual pace of each child is accommodated; the reality is understandably somewhat different, given the number of children a teacher has in a class. Parental expectations also come into play, and work is expected to be "harder"; however, many educators encourage teachers and parents to work with individual differences. Some parents also seem to be more concerned with the child learning something "new" or performing more difficult tasks, rather than in having a successful experience with the parent.

Teacher Reaction to Guides

The test design of ***Family Connections 2*** differed from that of ***Family Connections 1*** in one significant way: in this test, project staff did not have first-hand experience with the majority of participating teachers. Only the teachers on the Advisory Group met with AEL staff. During the test of ***Family Connections 1***, the teacher group met monthly with project staff in one-day work sessions.

Data concerning implementation of the ***Family Connections 2*** test were probably affected by how teachers received training. Teachers who were trained by AEL project staff perhaps placed more emphasis on preparing parents (with the announcement provided) and the community (with the news release). Those teachers were limited in how much time they were able to devote to training others at their sites and had mixed results. Questionnaire responses revealed

that although virtually all participating teachers prepared families to use the guides with the written announcement provided in the Handbook, most did not go beyond that degree of preparation. Slightly more than a quarter used the news release; one site provided project staff with a copy of the resulting newspaper story, and others said they had received newspaper coverage. Four teachers reported making presentations at parent meetings, and six indicated they had prepared families in other ways.

Although 29 of the 32 teachers reported that they had sent the guides home on the same day of the week, with slightly more than half choosing Thursday, they did not necessarily choose the day of distribution at the outset. Coordinators said that some teachers experimented, depending on how they interpreted the Handbook, which indicated that ***Family Connections 1*** teachers found Thursday to be the "best day."

Only half of the teachers responded that they completed Sunshine Grams every time they appeared in ***Family Connections***, even though all 32 teachers agreed, most of them strongly, that the Grams are a valuable tool for developing self-esteem in children. Again, that result might have been adversely affected by lack of training from someone experienced in the use of the guides.

Nonetheless, teacher responses were almost unanimously positive, both on the agree-disagree scale and in their comments.

Reactions from Advisory Group

The Advisory Group informed the work of the project from its inception, and their proprietary stance seems to reflect a belief that they got a commensurate return for their investment. Most influenced their schools to purchase ***Family Connections 2*** for use during the next school year. One member made a presentation on the materials at a statewide meeting of the affiliate group of

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the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Another arranged for her state to include information about ***Family Connections 2*** in a mailing to all early primary personnel. It would seem that their commitment to the project did not end with their involvement in the pilot test.

Some of the most informative data in this evaluation resulted from the use of videotaped responses to off-camera questions. The Advisory Group was made up of experienced, skilled, and knowledgeable early childhood practitioners and specialists. Their recorded reactions and reflections constitute data that will have continuing value and utility.

SECTION VII: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The Rural Excel program developed a second volume of ***Family Connections*** based on repeated requests from users of the first volume, designed for families of preschool-aged children. Teachers and others in the field of early childhood education believed that the successful format and content of ***Family Connections 1*** would serve equally well for kindergarten and very early primary children. The data indicate that we can draw the following conclusions with a strong degree of certainty:

(1) ***Family Connections 2*** is as effective as ***Family Connections 1*** in encouraging families to be involved with their young children's learning.

(2) Parents do use developmentally appropriate materials that schools provide if the materials are easy to use, readily available and inexpensive, and do not require large blocks of time.

(3) Teachers who used ***Family Connections 2*** in a pilot test almost unanimously agree that they would recommend its use to other teachers.

(4) Advisory Group members not only informed the project's work throughout, but also demonstrated their commitment to the guides by encouraging their adoption in schools and other programs in their respective states.

(6) The use of site coordinators enabled project staff to test ***Family Connections 2*** with a larger and more diverse population, but did not allow staff to work directly with all participating teachers; this may have had some adverse effect on implementation.

(7) ***Family Connections 2*** is useful and acceptable to families across a broad socioeconomic range, and not just to "at-risk" families.

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(8) The kindergarten-plus descriptor to ***Family Connections 2*** can be more specifically defined as a result of the pilot test: the guides are suitable for kindergarten and for mixed-age grouping of K-1. Their use with older primary children should be considered in light of the population's preschool experience and home enrichment.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions drawn above, Rural Excel makes the following recommendations for continued evaluation of ***Family Connections 2*** and other work with this model for parental involvement in young children's learning:

(1) AEL should follow the pilot test with a yearlong field test of all 30 issues of ***Family Connections 2***. The field test should include kindergarten classes, kindergarten-first grade combinations, and first grade classes.

(2) The evaluation design for the field test of ***Family Connections 2*** should expand the number of variables examined in the pilot test. For example, evaluators could measure the parents' beliefs and perceptions about the school, of the child's teacher, and of their children. Alternatively, evaluators might measure the children's motivation and interest in learning, confidence in their own abilities, and other such variables.

(3) AEL should explore methods for using both volumes of ***Family Connections*** with the burgeoning numbers of family literacy programs, including parents in correctional institutions, as a further test of the guides' utility.

(4) Project staff should continue active promotion to disseminate ***Family Connections 2***: mailings to principals including sample copies, presentations at regional and national conferences, exhibits and advertising in professional journals, and other activities as they are available.

(5) Project staff should pursue opportunities to collaborate with others, including Regional Educational Laboratories, to produce Spanish-language versions of both volumes of ***Family Connections*** to serve yet another segment of the population.

(6) Project staff should also pursue such opportunities to produce versions suitable for urban populations.

(7) AEL should consider using videotaped responses to off-camera questions as a data collection technique in other future evaluations.

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APPENDIX A

Dear Parent:

Thanks for completing the questionnaire I sent you earlier. Your comments and evaluations of the Family Guides were very helpful. Now that you have received a number of additional guides, I am asking you to complete a second form.

Thank you for working with us on this important project. Please return your completed form to me by _____. Let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Your Child's Teacher

Name:_____ Date:_____

Mailing Address:_____

City:_____ State:_____ Zip:_____

1. How many issues of **Family Connections 2** have you received? Check (√) your answer.

   _____ None _____ 1-3 _____ 4-6 _____ 7-9 _____ 10-12

2. A message to you as parents is on the front page of each issue. Would you say the messages are (check (√) all that apply):

___ interesting	___ hard to read	___ not helpful
___ too simple	___ not practical	___ boring
___ easy to read	___ helpful	___ practical

3. **Family Connections 2** also has directions for activities you can do with your child. Please check (√) all of the following that describe how you feel about the activities.

___ interesting	___ too hard to do	___ useful
___ easy to do	___ fun for my child	___ would like more activities
___ don't have supplies	___ boring	

4. Did you read aloud to your child the verses and poems in Family Connections 2?

___ Yes ___ No

If yes, what kind of experience did you and your child have?
Check (√) all that apply.

My Experience	Child's Experience
___ Enjoyable	___ Enjoyable
___ Boring	___ Boring
___ Interesting	___ Interesting

If no, why didn't you read aloud? _____

_____

_____

5. How much time would you estimate you spend in an average week with your child using **Family Connections 2**?

_____ less than 5 minutes	____ 30 to 59 minutes
_____ 5 to 14 minutes	____ 1 to 2 hours
_____ 15 to 29 minutes	____ more than 2 hours

6. What do you like best about **Family Connections 2**?_____

_____

_____

7. What do you like least about **Family Connections 2**? _____

_____

_____

8. Is there anything else you would like to say about **Family Connections 2**?

_____

_____

_____

9. Would you like to keep getting **Family Connections 2**?

____ Yes ____ No ____ Don't Care

10. The Appalachia Educational Laboratory developed **Family Connections 2**. Would you be willing for someone from the AEL to call you if they have additional questions about the guides?

____ Yes ____ No

If yes, what would be the best time to call and at what telephone number?

Time:_____ Phone Number:_____

APPENDIX B

TO: Teachers Using *Family Connections 2*

FROM: Pat Penn/Robert Childers

DATE: May 6, 1993

SUBJECT: Teachers' and Parents' Opinions of the Family Connections Program

The Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) is documenting what parents and teachers think of *Family Connections 2*. We are interested in your opinion and the reactions of the parents of your students.

The purpose of this evaluation is not to make judgments about a particular teacher, school, or project. Rather, it is to collect information from parents and teachers about the effectiveness of these materials.

Your responses will be kept confidential, so we hope you will feel free to answer each question candidly. For your participation in this field test you will receive a *Family Connections* tote bag and a certificate of appreciation.

Please mark or write your response to each statement directly on the questionnaire.

If you have any questions, please call 1-800-624-9120.

FCfield.sam

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Name (optional)_____

2. School_____

3. State_____

4. Grade presently teaching _____

5. Years of teaching experience (including this year)_____

6. In what ways did you prepare families for the use of Family Connections? Check (√) all that apply.

   ____ Written Announcement ____ News Release
   ____ Presentation at Parent Meeting
   ____ Other (Please describe)_____
   _____

7. Did you usually send the guides home on the same day each week?

   ___ YES ___ NO

   If YES, what day did you choose? _____

   If NO, how did you distribute the guides?_____
   _____

8. How often did you write Sunshine Grams?

   ___ Never ____ Every time they appeared
   ___ Occasionally

9. Did you place inserts in Family Connections ?

   ___ YES ___ NO

   If YES, what kind did you use? (e.g. Classroom Newsletter)_____
   _____

10. What type of training, if any, did you receive in using Family Connections?

    ____ From AEL staff ____Other (please describe)_____
    ___ From local personnel _____
    ___ None

PLEASE INDICATE, BY CIRCLING YOUR ANSWER, THE EXTENT TO WHICH YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS AS THEY DESCRIBE FAMILY CONNECTIONS. RESPOND TO ALL ITEMS USING THE FOUR-POINT SCALE.
(SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, A = Agree, and SA = Strongly Agree.)

11.	The activities in Family Connections are developmentally appropriate for my students.	SD D A SA
12.	There is evidence that parents used Family Connections with their children.	SD D A SA
13.	There is evidence that parents like receiving Family Connections.	SD D A SA
14.	I believe that parents' use of Family Connections made a difference in their children's learning.	SD D A SA
15.	At times I used activities from Family Connections with students in the classroom.	SD D A SA
16.	There is evidence that parents found Family Connections easy to use.	SD D A SA
17.	There is evidence that when our program provided Family Connections to parents, they became more involved in their children's learning.	SD D A SA
18.	I believe that parents who read the messages on the first page of Family Connections have a better understanding of how children learn and develop.	SD D A SA
19.	I believe that Sunshine Grams are a valuable tool for developing self-esteem in children.	SD D A SA
20.	As a teacher who has used Family Connections, I would recommend their use to other teachers.	SD D A SA

21. What do you like **best** about Family Connections?

22. What do you like **least** about Family Connections?

23. Please write here anything else you would like to say about Family Connections.

APPENDIX C

3. Is there anything else you would like to say about ***Family Connections 2***?

1. This is an interesting booklet for me and my son. It helps me think of ideas and projects for us to do together.
2. I applaud this series; great parental involvement activities; helps children realize that school is not the only place they learn something new--even mom and dad can teach science, social studies, math.
3. For some parents it might be more usable to publish a paperback book with chapters "Activities," "You and Your Child" (messages to parents) "Make Your Own Stories," "Arts and Craft Activities," etc. For others, this format might be best.
4. I think this would be great for preschool.
5. It's just the right amount of reading material. It only takes a few minutes to read through it.
6. I have saved them and feel certain we'll use them for activities this summer.
7. I should and will pay closer attention.
8. Much of this information seems to be things I have already read.
9. I think they are really nice and I enjoy them as much if not more than my child does.
10. I have enjoyed it very much. I saw some samples on display at the PTA convention in Lexington and I was very proud to know it is getting the exposure it deserves.
11. It seems to meet all wants/needs.
12. I would like more challenging activities.
13. I feel a lot of the activities are geared more for preschoolers, kindergartners and beginning first graders. My daughter can still benefit from some of the activities, but at the end of the first grade has pretty much outgrown a lot of the activities.
14. Great idea
15. Good idea!!
16. They are doing a great job--keep it up.
17. I plan to use them this summer for activities.
18. Theresa and I enjoyed our special time together as we read through each of the ***Family Connections 2***.
19. I really enjoy ***Family Connections 2***. I would love to keep getting them.
20. I enjoy the first page of ***Family Connections***. It is very helpful and informative when pertaining to feelings of your children. Sometimes you just don't realize what you say and do to your children and how it affects them.
21. My child is nearing the end of kindergarten and I feel ***Family Connections*** is geared to preschool age to early
22. Thank you for the special notes you write about Lyndsey. It's another way to reinforce the positive.
23. It's given me some great ideas for rainy days as well as days off school. Thanks!!
24. Thanks
25. Thank you
26. I like the DAISY Girl Scout inserts.
27. My younger children benefit from it more than my six-year-old--it's often too simplistic for her.
28. A parenting tip about how to deal with anger, fighting, love, death, etc. with your child--at any age.
29. More colorful and more pictures for kids.

30. We find it interesting, creative and fun to read together. Thanks for sharing it with us this year.
31. They are fun and useful.
32. An insert for the 5-6 year old to read on her own with simple words about an experiment, activity, or story. Kids love to get mail with puzzles or seek and find pictures--this would get the child more interested in the parent reading your reports <u>with this or at all!</u>
33. I could have used it in preschool and before my older child.
34. My child looks forward to reading ***Family Connections***. He gets excited.
35. We would have spent more time with these activities when he was first learning these things. I feel they are a very good preschool tool. Children should participate in these activities long before kindergarten.
36. I think these activities are geared toward 2-3-4 year olds.
37. Provide new information on topics such as science experiments and at-home projects.
38. I feel this is a quality program: simple, practical activities that can be integrated into a family's daily routine, good parenting tips, and some fun for children. However, it would have been more useful to me a year ago.
39. Although Jeff (age 5-1/2) could still benefit from some of the activities he is past the point where I feel compelled to make him sit down and do developmental things. He seems not to need most of these activities and we are both too much on the go to stop and make time for them. That's why we didn't do many of the activities even though I thought it was a good publication. Two years ago I would have used it more.
40. Learning game or maze which would directly involve the child with the publication.
41. Very enjoyable.
42. I think it's a great idea.
43. I think parents need more information on parenting skills specifically.
44. This is a very good idea.
45. Great concept.
46. I wish I had more time to focus on them.
47. Keep them simple and interesting. We have limited time in our family and can only do the activities if they are not too complicated.
48. Good idea to help families do things together.
49. Add more book lists and possibly more physical activities.
50. I am happy to be getting it.
51. I really enjoy reading them.
52. I really enjoy the activities suggested.
53. I think it is a great newsletter. But with so many things going on in life--hard to sit down and do.
54. No, except I wish this was an all the time thing.
55. I feel this is a quality publication.
56. Good idea!!
57. Excellent idea. Would like to see it in all the grades with more advanced activities!
58. It helps my child learn more skills and encourages him to grow more independent.
59. It's a very good article for children.
60. They are interesting and fun for my daughter. We enjoy the stories ad the poems very much.

61. This is great for the kids.
62. You need to put some more stories in it.
63. They are very enjoyable. They also give you a different idea on how to teach in a fun way.
64. Good for the children and educational for both parents and children.
65. My child loves to bring this home from school and she and I enjoy it together. It helps her to see that I am involved in her school work.
66. Would like more insightful articles concerning how a child views the world versus how an adult views the world in every day situations.
67. My child enjoys the extra reading time we have together--he also likes the activities.
68. Would like to receive more.
69. Everything is just fine to me so keep up the good work.
70. It's a nice program. My child loves for me to read to him.
71. ***Family Connections*** gives you an idea of how children think, and food and games they enjoy. We can never be too old to learn new things.
72. I think the poems are also enjoyable.
73. There was really nothing I didn't like about it.
74. Just that it will be great to have more projects to do together.
75. None
76. Bridget and I both enjoy reading these together--they are helpful in her recognition of new words.
77. Great for preschoolers.
78. Very good suggestions for working together on projects.
79. As a working mother it has helped me to spend quality time with my child.
80. My son really likes the poems and it has some good advice.
81. Thanks
82. I would like to continue getting them.
83. It's really great--I just wish I could have spent more time on it with Jonathan.
84. I find the advice on the front page useful and informative.
85. It's helpful and would like to receive more.
86. Not enough to it.
87. ***Family Connections 2*** has some very good ideas for helping my child to learn to read.
88. This is helpful if parents read this to their child and take time to do the activities that help the child learn.
89. Great tool to use for learning.
90. No
91. My child and myself enjoy the activities and spending time together. We look forward to receiving the ***Family Connections***.
92. This is nice activities for parents to become involved more with their children.
93. Some ideas are very useful!
94. Keep up the good work. I plan on using them over and over this summer, when I have more time to put these ideas to good use.
95. I personally need to take more time out of a busy day to do more of these wonderful ideas. They are not really very time consuming.
96. I enjoy reading the suggestions and Kayla likes the stores and activities.
97. No
98. I don't think it was very effective to include the DAISY Scouting Info. It seemed to distract from the Family Connection newsletter.

99. Very effective tool for sending positive tips for parents to interact with their child/children. We love it.
100. No
101. We really enjoy it.
102. Some of the words need to be put to a child's point of view to where they can understand it a lot better.
103. I feel there is a very valid need for this publication in the Appalachian area; especially within the region where young children are not provided with early childhood experiences needed to be successful in school.
104. I think it is a good idea to have something like this for this age group. The projects and recipes are fun and simple for them to do or help to do.
105. It can be informative at times.
106. It has been a nice surprise to have this as a supplement to bridge the gap between home and school.
107. Thank you. I hope this endeavor is as helpful to others as it is to me.
108. The poems are easy for first graders to read.
109. Not at this time only that I like it.
110. Be sure to keep printing it on colored paper so that it is noticed among the many other papers.
111. We really enjoy when we get ***Family Connections 2*** from Mrs. Groves, the kindergarten teacher. We read together that evening and talk about what is in the Connections 2.
112. I think it is a very good program and you should keep it up.
113. I was very impressed with them; however, I attend school also and the school year is packed. But, they <u>will</u> be used.
114. I think all kids should have one to bring home every day of the week and some for the weekend--they are so much fun we do them over and over all the time until we get another one.
115. I think they are great.
116. I think it's very nice and we really enjoy them.
117. My child likes the things that it has and the poems that I read to her.
118. I think that more programs should be set up to involved parents and children.
119. I think you should make them with a folder so they can be kept easier.
120. It helps the parents understand the views of a child better.
121. This is an exciting and fun way for a parent to help with the child's education and development.
122. The ***Family Connections*** 2 is a very good booklet.
123. I saved most of t he activities to do through the summer. Not enough evening time to do all. Very good reading materials.
124. It's fun for the kids.
125. It's good for mothers to know teaching a child begins at home. Encouraging a child build self-esteem.
126. We enjoyed it but we usually spend time together anyway. I always encourage her to talk about what she learns at school.
127. It's fun for the kids.
128. Great opportunity to share time together and Trent absolutely loves to receive each issue.
129. It's fun for the kids.
130. It's a good program and should be continued.
131. I think it's great. It has activities that children and parents can do together.

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132. It's fun doing the projects together.
133. We would like to get more.
134. It's a fine project and educational to me as a mother.
135. Would like to have more things to do in ***Family Connections***.
136. Yes, it is a real pack of information for parents and kids.
137. It is easy to read and I usually let my child help to reading the ***Family Connections***.
138. It is very interesting.
139. It has been fun and educational for my child.
140. It's fun to read and fun for my child to learn.
141. It's great.
142. Yes, possibly a suggestion for articles for older children such as 8-10 year olds. Also articles for single parenting women would be nice.
143. Very informative--I like the recipes.
144. I would like to have more activities in ***Family Connections***.
145. It is very helpful and interesting to learn things you have never heard of.
146. Good reason to spend time with your children, when they want to play.
147. No, they are nice.
148. Keep them coming. They are a lot of fun. Also gives you something to do over the summer break.
149. The name really says it all-***Family Connections***.
150. Is this geared for lower income families with little cultural advantages? That's how it makes me feel. Perhaps it is reaching these families, but you need to determine that.
151. Keep up the good work!
152. We love it!!
153. The activities are great learning experiences for my three and five year olds. We would like to see more ideas for these ages.
154. My three-year-old son enjoys listening to the stories too.
155. I think they come too frequently for our use. Maybe once a month would be better.
156. Is there a ***Family Connections*** for older children?
157. Keep it coming.
158. Very helpful in many ways.

APPENDIX D

Citation Form

The Program Evaluation Standards (1994, Sage) guided the development of this (check one):

_____ request for evaluation plan/design/proposal
_____ evaluation plan/design/proposal
_____ evaluation contract
_x_ evaluation report
_____ other: _____

To interpret the information provided on this form, the reader needs to refer to the full text of the standards as they appear in Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, *The Program Evaluation Standards* (1994), Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

The *Standards* were consulted and used as indicated in the table below (check as appropriate):

Descriptor		The Standard was deemed applicable and to the extent feasible was taken into account.	The Standard was deemed applicable but could not be taken into account.	The Standard was not deemed applicable.	Exception was taken to the Standard.
U1	Stakeholder Identification	x			
U2	Evaluator Credibility	x			
U3	Information Scope and Selection	x			
U4	Values Identification	x			
U5	Report Clarity	x			
U6	Report Timeliness and Dissemination	x			
U7	Evaluation Impact	x			
F1	Practical Procedures	x			
F2	Political Viability			x	
F3	Cost Effectiveness	x			
P1	Service Orientation	x			
P2	Formal Agreements	x			
P3	Rights of Human Subjects	x			
P4	Human Interactions	x			
P5	Complete and Fair Assessment	x			
P6	Disclosure of Findings	x			
P7	Conflict of Interest	x			
P8	Fiscal Responsibility	x			
A1	Program Documentation	x			
A2	Context Analysis	x			
A3	Described Purposes and Procedures	x			
A4	Defensible Information Sources	x			
A5	Valid Information	x			
A6	Reliable Information	x			
A7	Systematic Information	x			
A8	Analysis of Quantitative Information	x			
A9	Analysis of Qualitative Information	x			
A10	Justified Conclusions	x			
A11	Impartial Reporting	x			
A12	Metaevaluation	x			

Name (typed) Robert D. Childers Date: May 31, 1994

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Relation to Document: co-author
(e.g., author of document, evaluation team leader, external auditor, internal auditor)